

# Hepatitis C Information for Veterans

Fact Sheet | April 2014

[www.hepatitis.va.gov](http://www.hepatitis.va.gov)

## What is hepatitis?

"Hepatitis" means inflammation of the liver. Toxins, certain drugs, some diseases, heavy alcohol use, and bacterial and viral infections all can cause hepatitis.

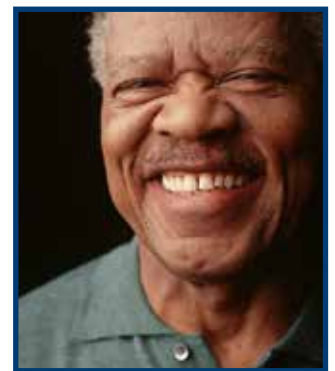
Hepatitis is also the name of a family of viral infections that affect the liver; the most common types are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

## What is hepatitis C?

- It is a contagious liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV).
- It can be a mild illness lasting a few weeks in up to 15% of individuals.
- It can lead to chronic (lifelong) illness that can cause liver damage, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), and liver cancer.
- It is spread mainly through contact with the blood of an infected person.

Persons who have HCV infection often have no symptoms and can live for many years without feeling sick.

Common symptoms include fever, fatigue, nausea, abdominal pain, dark urine, jaundice, and joint pain.



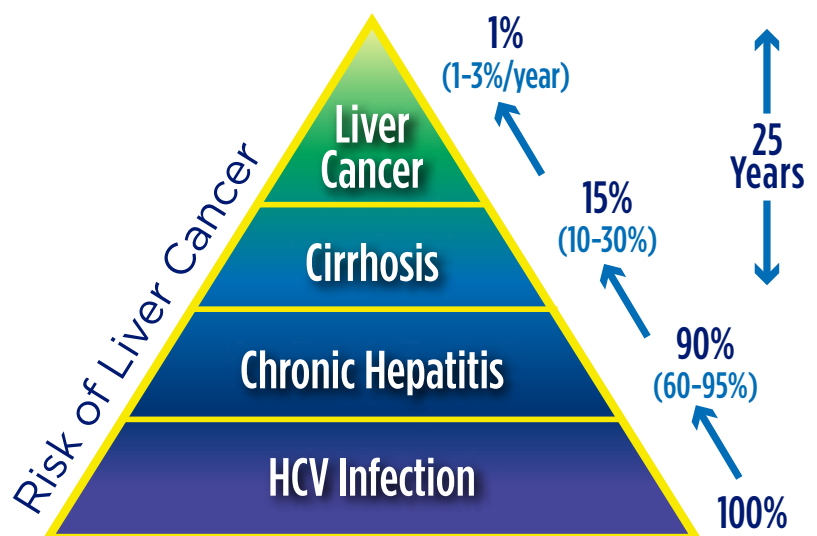
## How many people have hepatitis C infection?

- 3.2 million people are living with HCV infection in the United States.
- Veterans enrolled for care at VA have higher rates (5.4%) of HCV infection than the general U.S. population (1.8%).

## What are the long-term effects of hepatitis C?

Of every 100 people infected with HCV, about

- 60-95% will develop chronic HCV infection
- 10-30% will develop cirrhosis
- 1-3% will develop liver cancer annually after developing cirrhosis

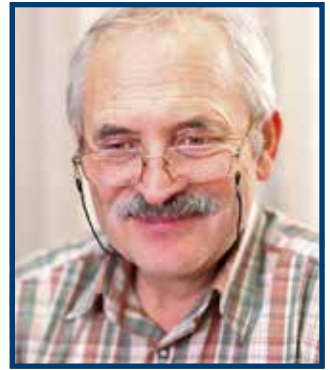


*Goodgame B, et al., Am J Gastroenterol 2003*

## Who should be tested for hepatitis C?

Talk to your doctor about being tested for HCV if any of the following are true:

- Were born between 1945 and 1965
- Are a current or former injection drug user or have ever shared needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject or snort drugs, even if it was many years ago
- Were treated for a blood clotting problem before 1987
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992
- Are on kidney dialysis treatment
- Are a Vietnam-era Veteran
- Have abnormal liver test results or liver disease
- Work in health care or public safety and were exposed to blood through a needlestick or injury with another sharp object on the job
- Are infected with HIV
- Had multiple sex partners
- Have current or past sex partner(s) with HCV infection
- Obtained tattoos or body-piercings in non-regulated settings
- Have a history of alcohol abuse or dependence
- Were born to a mother infected with HCV
- Were incarcerated



About 5-30% of people who get who get HCV infection will clear the virus from their bodies without treatment and will not develop chronic infection.

## Can hepatitis C infection be spread by sexual contact?

Yes, but the risk of getting HCV from sexual contact is believed to be low. More research is needed to understand how and when HCV can be spread by sexual contact.

### The risk increases for those who:

- Have multiple sex partners
- Have a sexually transmitted disease
- Engage in rough sex
- Are infected with HIV



## Can hepatitis C infection be spread within a household?

- Yes, but this does not occur very often.
- It can be spread by the blood of an infected household member
- If you live with someone who has HCV infection, you should not share personal care items such as razors or toothbrushes

## How is hepatitis C infection treated?

- There are two main types of treatment regimens for hepatitis C. If you have hepatitis C, discuss treatment with your health care provider. VA offers treatment for Veterans with HCV.

### For more information:

Talk to your VA health professional, call your health department, or visit [www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis)

